

SKID-ROW JOURNAL

Joseph Bustillos

Philosophy 198 C

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How to work the 6-to-10 shift of a
Soup Kitchen that doesn't open until 8:30.

Joe Bustillos
Philosophy of Concern
Pl. 198 C

My recent experience on Skid-Row has been an enlightenment to me. Although it was not as eventful as it could have been, Nonetheless, each seemingly "insignificant" moment gave light to just that much more of an understanding concerning the men of Skid-Row, and of my own personal values. In discussing the day's events I will be intermingling each event with each specific insight. This will be done because, while event often leads to insight, in many cases as insight will have specific bearing on a given event.

Because of my schedule, I chose to go to the Soup Kitchen during the Tuesday six-to-ten shift. This choice brought me to my first cultural shock of the day, waking up at four in the morning. It was not that this was such an early hour in the morning but that, since I've been at this school, that has become the accepted hour in which one goes to sleep. Alas, after contemplating the infantile pleasures of a warm bed and of having abundant rest, I succumbed to the higher ascetic pleasures of going with only four hours of sleep and the damp fog that often gathers at the flagpole at five in the morning.

By five in the morning I found myself standing alone near an unlit flagpole. I was at awe at the stillness and tranquility that was present. By six o'clock my awe had changed to boredom and was moving toward a sincere desire for warm sheets and rest. However; luck evaded me as a poor unsuspecting driver made her third lap around the flagpole.

Being delayed on the freeway, we didn't reach the Hennacy House of Hospitality until around seven o'clock. We soon learned that it didn't really matter how late we showed up, at least on that morning. That was because the people at the Soup Kitchen normally didn't open the place before 8:30 on days in which they don't bake bread. With an hour and a half to kill, my driver, who goes by the name of Rose, and I decided to walk around the streets. Staying on the streets in the 7th and grand area we only ran into a few of the famed "derelicts" of Skid-Row.

There was one occasion a black man approached me with the famous question, "Do you have a dime?" My empty pockets told me that the only reply that I could give him was no. Although he was not at all happy with my response, I got away with nothing more than a dirty look.

This experience however, didn't dampen my desire to experiment. I decided to go about asking people for the time, just to get their reactions. Actually I only got to ask one gentleman for the time, but that one time was sufficient.

He carried the characteristics of a businessman (suit, tie, polished shoes, briefcase, etc.) possibly a commuter. In responding to my question he didn't seem at all interested in talking with a long-haired college student that was dressed like one of our friends from 6th street. An interesting reversal of roles took place. I became the man who had asked for a dime and the business man portrayed me (although I insist I wasn't as impersonal as he was). Without looking at his watch or me, he recited the time and then directed me to a large clock about two

blocks away. He then silently walked away while I squinted at a clock that was hard to read in the morning sun.

At about eight-fortyfive we returned to the now opened Soup Kitchen. Being greeted by a Mr. Glen Cooper we proceeded to a job that caused the greatest emotion that day -- cutting onions. Because we could only stay a short while we didn't get to experience the full flavor of the Soup Kitchen encounter. Two events did stand out however. The first was the fellowship shared by the workers themselves and the second was when a man came to Glen seeking to have his sprained ankle soaked in hot water and epsom salt. The reason the latter event stands out so much in my mind is because it reminds me of another man, who before his untimely death (and glorious resurrection), washed the feet of his disciples.

Seeking to help these men, as men (contrary to popular belief that the poor misfits of sixth street are something "subhuman"), the workers at the Hennacy House perform a task that is too often left undone. Being too realistic to accept Plato's Republic, too optimistic for Sartre's nausea, and too passive for Nietzsche's superman, the workers see the social/spiritual, as well as the physical, need portrayed on sixth street. And a sincere desire is born in them to ^{be} a part of meeting those needs.

"If I then your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye ought also to wash one another's feet."
(John 13:14.)



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Communication ✓

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On my most recent journey to the soup kitchen I decided to partake of an overnight [✓]incounter. So Mary Mc Queeny, Mike Lash and I left late friday night for the soup kitchen's boarding house in Boyle Heights.

The night that we went to the boarding house several representatives from the Resource Center for Non-Violence were giving a lecture. That is, we were told that they were scheduled to give a lecture. Because when we got there it resembled a rap session more than a lecture. The questions and problems discussed were of such magnitude that only a political science major could have fathomed the depths of emotion and meaning (i.e., it had been a long week for me and promised to be an even longer weekend so my body suggested that I pass the time by reading the inside of my eyelids. I heeded my body's advise). At the end of the lecture we were all invited for a little coffee and sweet bread; so I put down my novel (Forty Winks by I. Fealbetter) and make an attempt to mingle with the crowd.

In mingling with the crowd I was faced with a serious setback right from the start. I met a fellow from West Germany named Gunter. We were a hit right from the start. He spoke very little english and I spoke no german. I kept the conversation alive by asking questions like:

"What brought you to the United States?"

"An airplane," replied my guest.

"No, no! I mean, why did you leave Germany?"

"I got tired of Frankfaurt," was his responce.

I then began to ponder on what he meant in saying "I got tired." To me that seemed like an interesting question: why do people leave their homeland? But I suppose that even if Gunter knew why he was in America, he probably still couldn't tell me because he didn't know enough english. That question brought forth another question in my mind: How should mankind deal with the problem of communication.

As I handed out bread the next day at the soup kitchen I began to wonder how it was that a young college student ~~was~~ supposed to convey to an old man who had had the mishap to end up in skid-row that there still was hope; how an old derelik was to convince a young swinger that the aesthetic way of life was foolishness; how a college professor is to convince a class of students that Nietzsche or Kierkegaard has any relevance to real life. Ah!

In handling this problem of communication I feel that it is the responsibility of the individual speaking to relate to the listener's situation. Understanding the situation of the other, not justifying or even agreeing, but understanding is the first step toward resolving communication difficulties. I can think of one example that illustrates this point clearly: It seems that God wanted to tell mankind that he loves us, but of all the terms used in the languages of mankind the term "love" was most often misunderstood. So God set about to communicate to us concern is a way that we would not misunderstand it. He showed his love for us by allowing his own son to pay a terrible

debt of ours. We can relate to what it meant to let go of something or someone that we love dearly; and that is exactly what he did. He opened his hand to making to communicate with him. ✓



MILLER'S FALLS

ERASE

COTTON CONTENT

Philosophy of Life
at the Soup Kitchen.

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My experience at the Hennacy House has been rewarding, even a blessing. Unfortunately I find the basic philosophy, anarchism, hard to swallow. Many points of their ideology I see as being true except that which concerns anarchism.

Their method of communicating the "good news" is the most fruitful and rewarding. By simply living their specific ideologies they send forth a message far stronger than any preacher with a Th.D. could. Likewise, I agree with the statement that far too many of the "Missions" that are on Skid Row preach a message that dehumanizes its listeners. In speaking down to the men of 6th street these missions often lose sense of "brother helping brother."

Their statement: "We believe that ...it's important that the wealth of a country be distributed, so that there would be no poor", is something that I can relate to. Realism however; leads me to the conclusion that man, in his present condition, cannot complete such a task.

This leads me to the reason for my rejection of anarchism. In dealing with problems, such as the Skid Row problem, the anarchist says the problem's origin lies in a disease called government. Eliminate the government or society and the problem will likewise be eliminated. Plato said in his book the Republic (I'm paraphrasing) :

"they are as foolish as actors, thinking that
by adding this law and voting on that law.

that they will be able to change the nature of man. Don't they see? All they are doing is cutting off the heads of a hydra."

I understand the origin of all problems as being man's own imperfection. I'm not talking just about the imperfections of the men of Skid Row but of all men. Change the government from Democratic, to Communistic, from Socialistic to Anarchy and one still faces the same problem of man's imperfections. One can change the outside all he wants, but until the inside gets some work done on it the problem remains.

agreed

MILLERS FALLS
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